

Minimum requirements for water reuse

2018/0169(COD) - 28/05/2018 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to contribute to alleviating water scarcity across the EU, in particular by increasing the uptake of water reuse, in particular for agricultural irrigation.

PROPOSED ACT: Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: a third of the EU's land suffers from water stress all year round and water scarcity remains an important concern for many EU Member States. Increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, including severe droughts, are also likely to have negative consequences on both the quantity and quality of freshwater resources. Between 1976 and 2006, the number of areas and people affected by droughts went up by almost 20% and the total costs of droughts amounted to EUR 100 billion (EC, 2012).

Agricultural irrigation by far is the largest application of reused water worldwide and in Europe and a significant use of water in Europe, overall accounting for around a quarter of total freshwater abstracted.

By encouraging the reuse of treated wastewater for agricultural irrigation, the EU could therefore improve its capacity to respond to increasing pressures on water resources.

The need to address the problem at EU level has been acknowledged in the 2012 Commission [Communication](#) A Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources. A Fitness check of EU Freshwater policy published in November 2012 as a building block of the Blueprint, concluded that alternative water supply options with low environmental impact need to be further relied upon in order to address water scarcity.

Furthermore, the European Parliament, in its September 2015 [Resolution](#) on the follow-up to the European Citizens Initiative Right2Water encouraged the Commission to draw up a legislative framework on water reuse. Two instruments in force in the Union encourage the reuse of water, without however specifying the conditions in this respect. These are the Water Framework Directive ([2000/60/EC](#)) and the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive ([91/271/EEC](#)).

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: the preferred option for agricultural irrigation is a legal instrument with a fit for purpose approach (minimum requirements set depending on the food crop category and irrigation technique) and protection of local public health and of the environment (the key risk management tasks). It is estimated that the proposed instrument could lead to 6.6 billion m3 of water per year being reused for agricultural irrigation, compared to 1.7 billion m3 if the EU did not establish a legal framework.

CONTENT: the Regulation proposed by the Commission aims to mitigate water shortages in the EU, in the context of adaptation to climate change. It would ensure that treated waste water for agricultural irrigation is safe, protecting people and the environment.

More specifically, the proposal:

- defines the minimum water quality and monitoring requirements to be met and the obligation to perform certain essential risk management tasks in order to enable the safe reuse of urban waste water as part of integrated water management. These requirements should consist of a minimum of parameters for reclaimed water and other stricter or additional quality requirements, imposed, if necessary, by the competent authorities together with appropriate preventive measures;
- defines the process of risk management that should be carried out by the operator of a reclamation plant in cooperation with relevant parties (the end-user of the reclaimed water, the urban waste water treatment plant supplying water to the reclamation plant, etc.). The reclamation plant operator shall elaborate a water reuse risk management plan identifying additional requirements to further mitigate risks, which would be part of a permit issued by the competent authority;
- ensure transparency and access to information in order to increase user and public confidence in the safety of reused water: the public will have access to information online about water reuse practice in their Member States. With regard to access to justice, it should be possible for citizens and NGOs to legally review the decisions taken by Member States under this Regulation.

The proposed Regulation sets the date of entry into force and the date of application, i.e. one year after the date of entry into force in order to provide sufficient time to the Member States to adapt to the Regulation, as well as to elaborate an implementing act ensuring the uniform application of the risk management.